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Recommended Citation

University of Montana–Missoula. Office of University Relations, "Hustlin' Grizzlies make a difference" (1977). *University of Montana News Releases, 1928, 1956-present*. 28657.
<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/newsreleases/28657>

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HUSTLIN' GRIZZLIES MAKE A DIFFERENCE

by
Jim Kellar
UM Information Services

MISSOULA...

Hustlin' is what it's all about. That's what the two Grizzly defensive backs who nabbed seven of the team's record-setting eight interceptions against Portland State will tell you. Both Ed Cerkovnik, who grabbed a new UM individual record of four interceptions, and Kelly Johnson, who took down three--including a record 90-yarder--are hustlers.

"They never quit," said defensive secondary coach Pokey Allen. "They'll do well as long as they keep hustling."

Cerkovnik, who played his high school football at Malta under coach Glenn Flatt, did not go out for the team as a freshman at Montana. But his desire to play Grizzly football combined with his never-know-until-you-try attitude got him lifting weights in the fall and going out for spring drills.

At a mere 5'9", 157 pounds and unknown to the coaching staff, Cerkovnik gave his best effort in spring workouts. Evidently he made a good impression as he was awarded a partial football scholarship for the fall without ever having played in a college football game.

Coach Allen explained why: "He's a little small and not too heavy, but he's got tremendous quickness and great leaping ability. That makes up for his lack of height."

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Johnson, on the other hand, a Class AA all-stater from Great Falls High School, had football on his mind since coming to Missoula.

"I thought I had a chance to play here," Johnson explained. "Montana made a better impression on me than Montana State. It's a pretty good situation here. They've been good to me."

In high school, playing under coach Mick Delaney, Johnson was second in tackles as a senior and led the team in assists from his spot in the defensive secondary, where he played with fellow Grizzly Scot Ferda.

Johnson's record setting 90-yard interception return was his first touchdown ever. "The neatest thing about it was the blocking. Everybody just went from defense to offense so quickly," he said.

Both athletes pointed out that the Portland State victory had been a team effort.

"Everybody had a good game. We were really well-prepared. Coach Allen did a great job with the secondary," Johnson said. "We kept 'em guessing with our defenses."

Football certainly wasn't the only reason the two Great Falls residents (Cerkovnik's family now lives there too) came to the University of Montana.

Johnson plans to get a degree in the business field and go into real estate like his father, Duane.

Cerkovnik came to UM with a Montana high school honors scholarship. "I put a lot of work into my studies and that's the reason I came here," said the 3.79 GPA student. "The University is providing the kind of education I want." Ed plans to get a degree in history-political science and go on to law school.

The families of both young men take an active interest in football too.

At the conclusion of halftime of the Portland State game, Mrs. Johnson made her way through the crowd of football players coming back onto the field. She hugged her son, congratulating him for his great interceptions in the first half of the game,

The Cerkovniks could not make it down to Missoula for the game, and couldn't get it tuned-in on their home radio, so they sat in their car and listened to the game on the car radio.

Determination to give 100 per cent effort 100 per cent of the time is a trait common to these young men.

Johnson says he's learning more about football all the time, and Coach Allen, new to UM this season, is mainly responsible. "I didn't watch game films much last year, but Coach Allen encourages it. Now, I watch game films every day and I know what I'm looking for in them."

"Eddie C." as Cerkovnik's teammates know him, compares this year with last fall when he wasn't playing football. "I feel a part of something. I enjoy being on the team. At least I won't ever have to say I wasn't good enough to play."

In the Grizzly locker room there hangs a large bulletin board which reads "They gave their bodies for the team." The board honors outstanding efforts in the past weekend's game. Guess who's pictures were hanging there after the Portland State victory...

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